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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: ULY 25 MINISTERIAL AGREES ON AUGUST 1
AS DEADLINE FOR PARING VOTING CENTER LIST

¶1. Summary: At a July 25 ministerial on election issues, MOD, MOI, ISAF, the UN, and the IEC agreed that August 1 would be the final date to determine which of the nearly 7,000 voting centers would not open. The IEC agreed to adjust its delivery schedule for ballots and other sensitive materials to accommodate the August 1 date. Participants also agreed to step up joint security planning to maximize the number of centers that could be opened; discussed the need to recruit more female searchers; and agreed on a media and messaging plan. End summary.

¶2. On July 25, SYSRG Kai Eide hosted a short-notice meeting to identify a way ahead on the vexing issue of determining which of the nearly 7,000 intended voting centers will not be opened due to security concerns. Ministers Wardak (MOD) and Atmar (MOI) were in attendance, as were NDS Director Saleh, ISAF commander Gen. McChrystal, IEC Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Barakzai, and major donor country ambassadors. Amb. Ricciardone represented the U.S.

Voting Centers

¶3. As a prelude to the ministerial meeting, earlier in the day occurred the regular weekly meeting of the working-level Security Operations Group (SOG), which focused on the how many of the nearly 7,000 voting centers could be opened. At that meeting, ANA Ops Chief MG Karimi gave the following report:

--5898 polling centers confirmed will open;

-- 514 polling centers are still being surveyed/security assessed by ISAF and ANSF;

-- 283 polling centers have been collocated with other polling centers;

-- 211 polling centers will not open because they are in enemy controlled territory;

-- 61 polling centers were scheduled to be in locations that were in ravines, on the sides of mountains etc and are just not feasible.

¶4. The ministerial meeting that afternoon illustrated both the determination of ministers to come to grips with the voting center issue and the frequent disconnects within the GIROA on such fundamentals as using consistent data. Rather than the figure of 514 centers which remained to be determined if it was feasible to open, Wardak and Atmar agreed the number was 548. Depending on the ebb and flow of military operations and security preparations for election day, that number could shrink further, or it could increase. At Eide's suggestion, all agreed that August 1 would be the deadline for a final report from MOD on how many polling centers could not be secured and would have to be co-located or merged with other centers in farther-away, safer locations.

¶5. A key consideration in this discussion was the IEC's schedule

for transporting ballots and other sensitive materials to the centers, an operation that is now underway. The participants, including IEC's Barakzai, agreed that delivering these materials, for now, to the IEC's provincial centers and holding them there would enable the ministries to have until August 1 to make a final determination on how many centers would open, after which the materials would be transported to their final locations. The participants will meet again on August 1 to review the list.

¶6. Gen. McChrystal asked how late the security forces could stage operations which might result in adding additional secured, held areas, thus enabling more centers to open and be equipped with ballots by August 20. The answer, all agreed, was August 10; after this date, there would not be enough time to ensure ballots could be delivered to such newly-opened centers. McChrystal got the group's agreement for an augmented group of MOD, MOI, and ISAF planners to begin meeting immediately and report by July 30 on the prospects for adding more centers as the result of operations.

Community Policing

¶7. Atmar noted that raising locally-recruited short-term community defense volunteers could be a significant factor in election security, in areas where the threat was not huge. He said MOI and local governors were working with local tribal leaders and had already started recruiting such volunteers throughout the south and in Herat, Farah, Nimruz, Kunar, Nuristan, Wardak, Khost, and Paktika. (Note: At the staff-level Security Operations Group earlier in the day, MG Karimi said that there were still a lot of unanswered questions on local volunteer community defense solutions: Under whose authority would a community defense force operate?

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Would they be paid? And by whom? Would they be armed? When would they demobilize? Would they receive training? Would the MOI directive on ANP impartiality for the elections extend to this group?).

Female Issues

¶8. Ricciardone raised the need to recruit, train, and deploy female searchers, noting another attack was then underway by male terrorists disguised with burqas. Atmar agreed there is a pressing need for more female searches at polling stations and urged the ministries represented to make a maximum effort to recruit more of them. He promised that MOI could train them, but asked that IEC identify recruits over the next week. (Note: Last week Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development Minister Zia agreed MRRD would take a leading role in this effort. MRRD officials and IEC officials met today to work out details. Ministry Of Womens Affairs is also expected to support this).

¶9. NDS Director Saleh said his agency has received many reports indicating that at many villages, male heads of households and extended families intend to vote on behalf of the women in their group. IEC's Barakzai flatly rejected such plans, noting proxy voting is expressly forbidden. The UNDP representative asked that the NDS identify the locations of such reports, so UNDP could alert FEFA, the largest domestic observer organization, to be on the lookout for such attempts in those areas.

Media and Messaging

¶10. Participants agreed on the desirability of a phased media strategy. From now until August 10, the message would be that security forces and responsible ministries would be doing everything they could to ensure as many registered voters as possible could vote. After that date, local communities where voting centers would not open would be informed; still later, a nationwide message would explain the number of polling centers that could not be opened and why. Eide stressed that in conveying that message, it should be noted that security was not the only reason for not opening all of the planned centers; there were technical reasons as well, ranging

from movements of nomadic people to geographic obstacles. Above all, no voting center should be described as "closed," but rather "not opening". Amb. Ricciardone noted that GIROA, IEC, UNAMA, and various countries naturally might have different perspectives on the issues, but urged that senior press officers should meet soon and frequently to identify and address discrepancies together, before the inevitable media dissection. He also stressed that MOI and the IEC should quickly gain a grasp of the number and percentage of registered voters likely to be affected by the centers that would not open - if the percentage was as low as many believed it would be this should be an important feature of public messaging.

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